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A Tale of Two Brothers – A Different Survival

In 1939, life in Hrubeshower, Poland for the Roizen family was comfortable. However many of the Jews were poor and the Polish even poorer. The parents, Josef and Barucha, had four children and were involved in two businesses. Josef was in the forest business, renting forests from Polish princes and harvesting the lumber and selling it. The mother, Barucha was in the leather business with her father, Haskell Frost. The family lived in a compound consisting of four houses and an apartment building, 24 Narutiveczka, all occupied by other related families. There were servants, vacations at duchy and no financial problems. Anti-semitism was rampant among the Polish neighbors. The family was painfully aware of it but somewhat insulated against it. They attended the shtetl under the leadership of Rabbi Wertheim. The four children, Mendel 20, Motel 18, Leah 14, Succa 10 had music and religious lessons at home and attended Polish school and cheder.

The family was observant but not totally orthodox. The father was clean shaven and the mother did not wear a kutska shetl. The father came from Dubenka from the same not totally orthodox background. The Frost family had lived in Hrubeshower for generations. All that was to change forever in the fall of 1939. Ten days after the Germans invaded Poland with little resistance, Hrubeshower was occupied.

Immediately with the aid of the Poles, sanctions against Jews were enforced. Jews were forbidden to congregate or to attend synagogue. Businesses were suspended. Monetary tributes were extracted. The Poles scrutinized the Jews for infractions and reported to the Nazis. Jews met secretly to conduct religious services and discuss the situations at each others homes.

Two months after the occupation, all able bodied men and boys of certain age from Hrubeshower and nearby Helm and Hruberlo were ordered to appear for a "march". Josef Frost and his son Mendel were among those ordered to go. The "march" lasted one week. At the end of that week over 5,000 Jewish males had been exterminated; shot to death in the woods. Josef and Mendel returned home shaken. At that time, Josef decided his two eldest sons, Mendel and Motel had to leave. The parents never dreamed the younger children, old people or females would be harmed.

By December when an edict had come down that Jews were to wear the gold star on their clothes, Josef made arrangements for the boys to leave. He paid a farmer to take the two boys to his place near the Buch River and hide them there until they could safely swim across the river into Russian occupied Poland. Polish money was sewn into their coats, extra towels wrapped around their feet, new boots made and the farmer well paid. The mother warned Motel to "take care of the elder brother, Mendel". The little brother ran after them begging to be taken with them. The grandfather kissed their feet and the hems of their clothes. Years later the two brothers were to be haunted by this scene. They felt that if they had taken the younger brother, he too might have survived. Instead when they were hidden by a Polish family, someone turned Barucha and Succa in for sugar and the mother and child were shot to death in a public square, children killed first so the mother could watch. The father intervened in some camp.

Later when Mendel died in Motel's home of cancer, Motel felt he had betrayed his mothers' last wish.

Upon their arrival in Russian occupied Poland, they learned the Polish money had been completely devaluated, so they were penniless. They were 18 and 20.

The boys started to do business and moved to another place, but the Russians wanted all the refugees to go to deep Russia. They didn't want the refugees near the frontier. Those that refused (including the two boys) were arrested and taken any ways as aliens and sent to Siberia. The boys arrived in a part of Siberia not hitherto occupied. They and the other prisoners were all put to work to help build the Trans-Siberian railway. There was suffering but not because they were Jewish. They were cold, hungry and overworked but treated no differently than any other prisoner. No one had any idea of the horror taking place in Nazi occupied countries. After six months, the older brother, Mendel took very ill with pellagra (a debilitating disease caused by a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables in the diet). The younger brother bribed a doctor to remove Mendel to a hospital. From then on they were separated. Motel was kept prisoner until 1942, and released into Uzbekistan. He almost died of starvation because he had no communist papers and could not work. A Russian Jew took pity on him and helped him find a job. From then he engaged in black market to stay alive. Upon his recovery, Mendel opted to join the Russian army. He fought in the battle of Leningrad.

The boys were reunited in 1944 when a mutual friend reported Mendel's whereabouts to Motel and from then on they were reunited.

In 1946 Mendel reluctantly went back to their home in Poland. Motel followed within a month. They found only one cousin living, a survivor of a concentration camp. The boys sold all the properties for about \$490 to the Polish government. Unable to cope with the desolation, they left and walked to Czechoslovakia. Then, wanting to get to an American zone, they continued walking to a camp in Salzburg. From there they joined a group going to Italy. This was 1951. From Italy, chance led them to the U.S. Wanting to emigrate to Israel, they ended up on the wrong line and instead found themselves "on the way to the U.S."

Mendel again took ill and his departure was delayed. Motel emigrated several months before to the U.S. on the U.S. Mark Clark. The Jewish Committee sent Motel to Kingston, N.Y. to become a carpenter's apprentice to a contractor named Schwartz. Upon Charles arrival he remained in N.Y. buying good, cameras, jewelry from immigrants and the two boys established a business reselling the items.

After locating relatives in Pittsburgh, they moved to Pittsburgh. Motel went to work as a grocery clerk. The lure of a big paycheck led Mendel to work in an auto factory in Detroit.

Within two months, Motel was managing a small grocery chain in Pittsburgh. In time he came to own two supermarkets.

In 1957 Motel married a native Pittsburgher, Joan Frank. They had four children, Dr. Joel Rozen, Barbara Rozen, Lisa Rozen Slomovitz and Shari Rozen and became grandparents of two, Chad and Evan Slomovitz.

Charles returned to Pittsburgh in 1975 to live with his brother and family. Ill with cancer, he died in 1977. Motel died May 23, 1996. He was a good American citizen who was respected in his home and business communities. All of his children joined the medical community; the eldest son as a dentist, the next daughter as a teaching ophthalmic rep, the second daughter as a geriatric specialist and nursing home owner and the third daughter is a current med school student. The children live to his admonishments "It is not enough to live – you have to give meaning to your life by serving."

